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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9967
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001470

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND TASKFORCE-1

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SITREP 19: RESPONDING TO MEDVEDEV'S
ANNOUNCEMENT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. Tbilisi is formulating its official response to Russian President Medvedev's announcement that Russia would recognize the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and per DFM Vashadze, is looking for a strong reaction from the West (more details to be provided septel). Georgia has broken relations with Russia, and the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi is reportedly closed. Although no shots were fired overnight, the situation in Akhalgori remains tense. The Georgians are accusing the South Ossetians of kicking ethnic Georgians out of Megvrekisi village near Tskhinvali, and have moved Georgian police away from Akhalgori since they believe this village is next. The government has made a public and private push to energize the country and the international community to provide humanitarian aid quickly. End Summary.

AKHALGORI UPDATE

12. (C) On August 26, the OSCE reported the Ossetian and Georgian sides met in negotiations regarding Akhalgori. The Georgian side proposed a withdrawal of Ossetian forces from Zemo-Boli (on the outskirts of Akhalgori), to be followed by a withdrawal of Georgian police forces from Mosabruni (two kilometers from Akhalgori). A tentative agreement on the above withdrawals was struck. In addition, South Ossetians promised to stop all looting in the area. (Note: The OSCE IMOs have been inside Akhalgori on August 25 and 26. They have not yet confirmed looting has taken place in the town. End note.) Georgian police will patrol up to near Akhalgori. The OSCE noted that such an arrangement, if the two sides maintain it, leaves a power vacuum in Akhalgori that either side could be tempted to try to fill. Still, the OSCE noted the agreement shows some progress. In a statement to the press, National Security Council Secretary Kakha Lomaia said that Georgia is abiding by the terms of the cease-fire, but "would be forced to give . . . a proper response" if provoked. Later in the day, the Georgian MFA reported to us that Georgian police have retreated from around Akhalgori because they believe South Ossetians will move against ethnic Georgians soon and they want to avoid a conflict.

REACTING TO RUSSIAN RECOGNITION

13. (U) The press reports President Saakashvili commented that Russia is trying to legalize its occupation, adding "This is a challenge to the whole world. Such provocations will ultimately fail, but for them to fail, we have to be very mobilized; and Georgia will not be able to win this war alone." MPs Zhvania and Darchiashvili made similar statements; opposition New Rightists leader Gamkrelidze urged Georgia to react strongly to recognition, including severing all diplomatic ties with Russia. Secretary Lomaia suggested that a decision by the Russian government to extend recognition would carry no legal weight, but that its

political consequences for Russia would be serious: Russia would find itself even more isolated and less stable in the face of its 80 autonomous entities. The Georgian patriarch released a statement urging Russia not to extend recognition, echoing the concern with Russia's own separatist difficulties.

POLITICAL FALLOUT

¶4. (U) Gamkrelidze told the press he would end his moratorium on criticizing the government on September 8, the same day Parliament's "state of war" declaration expires. Opposition People's Party leader Davitashvili proposed the establishment of a coalition government of national conciliation, which would work on de-occupation of the country and restoration of its territorial integrity. Labor Party leader Natelashvili (who was elected to Parliament but who has not yet taken a seat) criticized Saakashvili for slandering the Labor Party instead of protecting the country.

HUMANITARIAN AID BECOMES FOCUS

¶5. (C) Government sources indicate that assisting those disrupted by the war, including both Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those that remained in villages, has become a key focus. The government held a meeting in Gori to highlight its reconstruction efforts. While in Gori, President Saakashvili emphasized the importance of providing shelter before winter. State Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili sent a letter to the Ambassador requesting that the U.S. "employ all means available to you to pressure the

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Russian side" to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, arguing that Russia has not fulfilled its obligations under point 3 of the cease-fire agreement. In a meeting with Sen. Lugar, Yakobashvili explained that the resettlement of IDPs was the government's first objective in its overall response to the crisis. Sasha Gakharia, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, told Poloff that many IDPs who are from Gori and villages nearby want to return to Gori as this is where their houses are located. MP Subeliani has recently asked IDPs from the Gori area to return so as to be nearby when assessment teams come to Gori. For those who are living in collective centers, the GoG has organized buses, but for now it is up to IDPs to make the decision as to whether they wish to return to Gori. IDPs from Kodori Gorge are principally in Tbilisi and there are no indications that they intend to relocate to Gori.

U.S. ASSISTANCE VESSELS

¶6. (C) We are awaiting an interagency decision regarding whether or not the next U.S. ship scheduled to provide humanitarian aid to Georgia will offload at Poti or Batumi. If the ship docks at Poti, its cargo would go by truck south to Batumi before sending it east on the major west-east highway toward Tbilisi. This plan would send a strong signal on the operability of the Poti port without directly challenging the Russians, whose checkpoints are outside Poti and not at the port itself.

PRISONER EXCHANGE

¶7. (U) The press reported the Georgians released three military detainees on August 25. There continues to be no additional information regarding reports of Georgian hostages in the Tskhinvali region.

VISITORS

¶8. (SBU) The economic delegation led by U/S Jeffrey

continues its work. The group is tentatively planning to travel. A press conference is scheduled for August 27 just prior to departure. Presidential candidate John McCain's wife Cindy is in Tbilisi August 26. A delegation led by Rep. Joe Donnelly (formerly led by Rep. Hunter) will visit Tbilisi September 1. H is working with CODEL Poe to combine Congressman Poe's September 1 visit with CODEL Donnelly.

TEFFT